August 1929

Shankill Road Library was commissioned and built on the instructions of Belfast Corporation. The architect was Thomas W Henry, President of the R.U.S.A in 1921 - 22, one of four sons of the Rev. Robert Mitchell Henry. His brothers included Robert, a Classics Professor at Queens University Belfast and Paul, a well known artist. T.W. Henry's design was chosen as the result of a competition assessed by J.C. Wyness of Edinburgh, architect of the Ulster Museum. Henry's other works include the Ulster Bank on the Crumlin Road (1919), Ballysillan House (a convent) also on the Crumlin Road (1919) and the sale ring and grandstand at King's Hall, Balmoral (1920). Thornbury Brothers were the building contractors.

Work commenced in 1926 and was completed on 11 September 1928 costing £15,000. The official opening took place on 9 November 1928. The ceremony was conducted by the Right Hon. Sir William Turner, Lord Mayor of Belfast. The huge stained glass window siding onto Mountjoy Street was installed last as the position was used for loading the heavy fittings into the library. The red brick on the exterior walls was probably supplied by the local brickworks of which there were three in the Shankill area, McGladdery's, Murphys and Parkview.

The library originally had a museum gallery on the upper floor which included part of the Patterson collection which was later relocated to the Ulster Museum.

There is a photographic portrait of Tommy Henderson (1887 - 1970) Stormont MP, in the Foyer of the Upper Gallery. This was donated by Tommy Henderson himself, who had close links with Shankill Library. Tommy Henderson represented the Shankill Ward at the Northern Ireland Parliament for 29 years and in the Belfast City Council for 40 years. He was born at 11 Dundee Street (Shankill Road) in 1887, and became Belfast High Sherriff in 1943. Tommy Henderson was an Independent Unionist, who defended strongly working class interests throughout his long career spanning the 1930s and 1940s. He is famous at one time in his career for speaking for nearly ten hours, to argue his case!

"Early Sorrow"
by sculptor Patrick MacDowell